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Marks: The Adorned self

Tom Santelli

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MARKS
The Adorned Self
BY
Tom Santelli

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

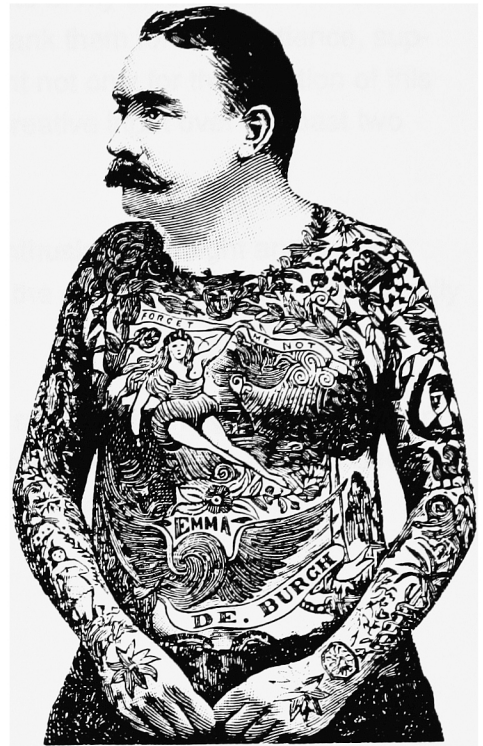
THESIS REPORT

MFA PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAM
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
MAY, 1989 - JUNE, 1991

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"On the body are expressed the secret wishes of the soul."

Olivia Vlahos, Body-The Ultimate Symbol.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the time and efforts of my thesis board : Elliott Rubenstein, Ken White and Judy Levy and thank them for their patience, support, constructive criticism and encouragement not only for the duration of this particular project but also for their individual creative input over the past two years.

A special thank you to Jessica for all of her enthusiasm, insight and moral support which has always gotten me through the difficult times, and to my family for allowing me to pursue my dreams.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge my fellow students in the graduate Fine Art Photography program at RIT (1987 - 89) . I feel very fortunate to have been a part of such a creative and supportive group. I miss you all.

PERMISSION STATEMENT

I Tom Santelli prefer to be contacted
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Date June 9'

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PREFACE

My decision to investigate various aspects of body adornment seems, to me, a logical one given my ongoing fascination with photographing people and my interest in subculture that mainstream society chooses to label as "deviate" behavior.

Before coming to Rochester initial attempts to photograph people who had decided to modify their physical appearance proved to be less successful than I had hoped. While at RIT however, new possibilities presented themselves and I saw the potential to once again attempt a serious documentation of this subject. It was at that time (August 1988) that I decided to submit my thesis proposal.

Although I greatly looked forward to photographing these adorned people on a one-to-one basis I realized that these portraits by themselves should not constitute the core of my thesis work but would instead become the impetus to a deeper exploration of this subject.

As a result of my initial research I became increasingly interested in what reasons motivated people to choose a particular type of adornment and why. How does the physical act of becoming adorned fall into categories of ritual? Once adorned, how is the person "different", what happens emotionally, intellectually and culturally? And as an extension of this - can adornment also be an experience which can psychologically "mark" various stages of our existence and serve as a blueprint of our individuality?

I also wished to learn more about the history and different types of physical modification along with their primitive origins and examine why they have experienced such a resurgence of popularity within numerous levels of contemporary society.

In addition, I viewed this project as a unique opportunity to continue utilizing various alternative photographic processes I was exposed to during my first year of study at RIT while allowing for experimentation with these techniques along the way. Since adornment is primarily a hands-on activity I felt the work should suggest that same aesthetic.

This paper will serve as a written documentation of what I've learned and experienced during the course of compiling my information and producing the work for my thesis exhibition.

August 12,1988

The following is a thesis proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Imaging Arts Degree, College of Graphic Arts and Photography, School of Photographic Arts and Sciences, Rochester Institute of Technology.

PURPOSE

My objective is to investigate the significance of body adornment and individuality in reference to ancient and contemporary society through photographic imagery.

BACKGROUND

Ever since I first picked up a camera the desire to photograph people has been my strongest motivation to make pictures. The documentation of appearance and personality through photographs is a curious barometer of how we are all similar yet inherently different.

Several painters and studio photographers have influenced my interests in portraiture but the first person to really strike an emotional chord in me was Diane Arbus. Her photographs of the outcasts and misfits on the fringes of society held an unusual attraction for me and greatly influenced my aesthetic in photography. More recently I have been inspired by imagemakers like Joel-Peter Witkin and William Parker who utilize surface manipulation for emotional emphasis.

After assisting a top fashion photographer in New York City I became excited about working with people within a studio environment. I wanted to work with subjects who had presence and were strong individuals. People who were "different" yet very comfortable with their uniqueness. In New York City these people were not too hard to find but were intimidating to approach. It was during this time I became interested in photographing people who chose to embellish their physical appearance in dramatic ways.

PROCEDURE

I have two objectives for my thesis exhibition. First, I wish to interview and photographically document people who have made body adornment a necessary and vital statement about their individuality. These images will be "straightforward" photographic portraits in both black/white and color. Portions of our conversations will be included to provide additional

depth and insight into the subject's persona. Utilizing this information, along with magazine articles and books, I will attempt to define why I find this ornamentation so fascinating.

My second objective will be to relate these symbolic "marks" to my perceptions of the physical self and emotional/intellectual personality by adorning my own body through various photographic techniques. These "self-portraits" may include collage, multiple exposures, negative and print manipulation and alternative printing processes.

All of the work in the exhibit will be framed and no larger than 16x20".

My bibliography will focus on aspects of primitive cultures and anthropology, contemporary body adornment, social mores, symbolism and iconography, self-portraiture and alternative printing methods.

Memo to: MFA faculty: MFA students BLEACH, BEZANSON,
COHEN, HARRIS, MTHETHWA, SANTELLI.
Willie Osterman, Annette Fournet, Stephen DiRado.
From: KEN WHITE, Chair, Fine Art Photography Dept. (EKW)
Date: August 29, 1988
Subject: MFA Advancement to Candidacy, FALL QUARTER 1988

The schedule for MFA Advancement to Candidacy sessions will be as follows, from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm on TUESDAY, Aug. 30th.

9:30 - 10:00 am	<u>Kristina Bezanson:</u> KALEIDOSCOPIC TOPOGRAPHY Thesis Board Chair = M. Leinroth
10:00- 10:30 am	<u>Hagit Cohen:</u> LOOKING AT, LOOKING THROUGH Thesis Board Chair = M. Leinroth
10:30- 11:00 am	<u>Philip Harris:</u> STORIES Thesis Board Chair = J. Levy
11:00- 11:30 am	<u>Zwelethu Mthethwa:</u> "PERSONAL" CONSTRUCTS Thesis Board Chair = J. Levy
11:30- NOON pm	<u>Tom Santelli:</u> MARKS Thesis Board Chair = E. Rubenstein
NOON - 12:30 pm	<u>Gordon Bleach:</u> THESIS PROPOSAL Thesis Board Chair = _____

NOTE: In the event that the time sequence is not followed, please be prepared to begin the sessions 5-10 minutes before or after the stated times here. Revised schedule (if necessary) will be posted on the door of 3105 on TUESDAY the 30th.

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
MFA PHOTOGRAPHY

Thesis Sharing ^{Defense}

This is a record of the thesis sharing
for TOM SANTELLI.
student

Date held MAY 7th 1989

The thesis show was;

Approved X

Disapproved

Elliott Rubenstein
Chairman

Comments:

Excellent Thesis and defense!

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my parents, who, for my 12th birthday gave me my first camera and inadvertently planted a seed.

It was an Imperial Debonair model 810 manufactured by the Herbert George Company from Chicago, Illinois. I later found out it had originally belonged to my older sister who, I suspect, no longer held an interest in photographic endeavors.



EPIGRAPH

"...the human being stands in a problematic relation with his own image, and this leads him to retouch his body in various ways, by deformations, mutilations, tattooing, scarring, make-up, cosmetics, adornments, plastic surgery, etc. It may be that this self-retouching impulse has a biological origin. Man is born prematurely, with a skin too clear, too fine, too fragile, calling for some kind of artificial protection, whether of a physical or thermic or, most of all, a symbolic nature. Man is exposed in both senses of the term: to dangers and to the eyes of others."

Michel Thevoz, *The Painted Body*

INTRODUCTION

Much of my initial research turned up information dealing specifically with issues and motivations surrounding tattooing. I decided that this aspect would certainly serve as an appropriate start, but I was interested in expanding the scope of my research as it progressed. I wanted to find out more about alternate types of physical modification and why they were/are practiced.

I was curious to uncover what aesthetics could be included under the umbrella of adornment.

Motivation

Why do individuals choose to alter their physical appearance ? The reasons seem to be as disparate as society itself. Adornment becomes a personal activity which often helps to establish an individual's affinity with their immediate surroundings. It anchors them to a position of existence within their particular society.

" Smear on charcoal, brilliant ocher, and yellow clay; add an apron fringed with pig's tails, a dagger at the waist made of cassowary bone, and a shiny mother-of-pearl neckpiece; top these off with a wig of human hair lined with lorikeet feathers and bird-of-paradise plumes. The result: a man becomes a vision that commands attention, that inspires awe and respect in the community.

Body painting, or decoration of self, is perhaps the oldest art form of the human species. How people modify their bodies is an important aspect of social communication. Adornment establishes a persona, which carries messages of age, sex, and status. Decoration can reflect one's individuality while it reaffirms one's membership in the group." 1

Motivations to adorn oneself also include a desire to proclaim a certain connectedness with nature. A primitive society's pure existence was based on a harmonious relationship with the elements of their surroundings. The colors used were supplied from the earth and local foliage. The feathers, bone, fur, stones, claws and teeth were all by-products of the individual's immediate environment. A person became one with nature to perpetuate the cycle of life.

Another reason for adornment was to emphasize the importance of a particular ceremony or event. Outward adornment, along with actual physical modification, was often practiced to mark or initiate an individual who was passing from one stage of life into another. By " graduating " to a new, more mature station in life, they had " earned the privilege " to display their achievement on their body.

Permanent modification involves varying degrees of physical pain. To endure this ritual becomes a sign to all of the individual's courage, inner strength, and prowess. The more severe the alteration, the greater the status.

Adornment also reaches the level of non verbal communication. Certainly, within a particular society the use of a specific color or pattern on the face or body will instantly signal a conditioned response. If the person encountered is from an alien society, the message transmitted is still an immediate one. In this respect adornment may be viewed as an instrument of territoriality.

Adornment functions to reaffirm a person's unity with the universe around them. It is a ritualistic activity which serves to remind us that we are vital, living beings trying to coexist with all other living things. It remains the only link we have to our so called " primitive " origins. " Amidst an almost universal feeling of powerlessness to " change the world, " individuals are changing what they do have power over: their own bodies. That shadowy zone between the physical and the psychic is being probed for whatever insight and freedoms may be reclaimed. By giving visible bodily expression to unknown desires and latent obsessions welling up from within, individuals can provoke change - however inexplicable - in the external world of the social, besides freeing up a creative part of themselves; some part of their essence." 2

Paint

Any form of adornment becomes an attempt to transfer the anatomical body into a symbolic one. The earliest tool utilized to accomplish this was paint.

The use of paint as an instrument of individual expression dates back to the prehistoric cave paintings found in Gargas and Pech-Merle France. Here the images of silhouetted hands with outstretched fingers were stenciled against the cold, textured cave walls. They suggest a conscious willingness to leave a human mark in a very particular place and also imply an intention to record the actual outline of a body part thereby indicating the body's importance. The paint was applied by blowing or dabbing pigment over the hand, similar to an airbrush technique.

Archaeologists speculate these handprints might have some ritualistic or religious significance. " We find a survival of this painting, this anointing of mother earth, thus humanizing the stone and quickening a living continuity with it. " 3

The use of paint, with it's particular color palette and how it is applied to the face and body has limitless meanings with regards to geography. Although some society's approach to the usage of paint may be comparable, this is not the norm. " Take men's face paint. Around the Bay of Bengal, it signals a warrior on the way to battle; in Africa, an adolescent who has just been circumcised; in the Brazilian jungle, where only animals are unpainted, it indicates humanity; and in the United States, it signals a middle-class man who hopes you'll think he's just returned from a winter week in the Caribbean. " 4

Without getting into a detailed ethnographic analysis of color in terms of it's numerous symbolic applications, I would like to add information my reading turned up called the " primary " color triad. Color found in the wild is very limited with regards to it's intensity. The more intense colors are the ones which can be ground into a powder then diluted with either fat, blood, plant juices or water. Heat will also intensify some colors.

This triad consists of white, red, and black, and their symbolism appears to be more universal than any other colors. There are some variations, but in general

" white stands for milk and semen and therefore dual in sexual nature. White is goodness, purity, strength. It has the power of hunting and chiefliness and the ancestors (ghosts). It has the power to cleanse, to make fertile, to make visible that which is hidden. Red has the power of life and blood,...the bloodline,... family,...evil as well as good. Black represents night, concealment, and death, both ritual and actual,...elimination and decay, it encompasses suffering, disease, the evil of witchcraft and sorcery,...fertility,... and rebirth." 5

Even now in contemporary society color still plays an important role in our everyday appearances. Messages of sexual attraction, affluence, age, lifestyle, and health (to mention a few) are transmitted through issues of color; and paint is still used to uniform our warriors about to face the enemy in battle.

Tattoo

" The Harrow appears to do its work with uniform regularity. As it quivers, its points pierce the skin of the body which is itself quivering from the vibration of the Bed. So that the actual progress of the sentence can be watched, the Harrow is made of glass. Getting the needles fixed in the glass was a technical problem, but after many experiments we overcame the difficulty. No trouble was too great for us to take, you see. And now anyone can look through the glass and watch the inscription taking form on the body. Wouldn't you care to come a little nearer and have a look at the needles? The explorer got up slowly, walked across, and bent over the Harrow. " You see," said the officer, " there are two kinds of needles arranged in multiple patterns. Each long needle has a short one beside it. The long needle does the writing, and the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear. " 6

Just mention tattooing to someone and chances are their reaction might be similar to our response to the torturous mechanical device described in the Kafka story above.

Figurative carvings and wall paintings dating back to the Stone Age highlight geometric markings on the face and body which many archaeologists theorize may be an indication of tattooing. Its practice in primitive society was quite common and widespread, and once again, functioned as an adornment which idealized and enhanced the body image. It was often used in conjunction with body paint but was more highly revered within the society because of its permanence.

The word " tattoo " may have been formed by onomatopoeia from the blow of the mallet on the pointed instrument; or it may come from the Tahitian word tatu, which in fact means " to strike. " 7

Tattooing was routinely performed on men, women and adolescents, often with an emphasis on maintaining the distinctness of each gender. The pattern and location varied based on the individual's sexual maturity and position within the group.

" The dominant function of tattooing in all tribal societies was to denote the bearer's status or social identity. Commonly, the painful tattoo process was part of the rite of passage to adult status. By stoically undergoing the tattoo ritual, recipients could demonstrate their bravery to the other members of the group... tattooing typically also had religious or magical purposes, often providing a means of identification or protection in the afterlife." 8

This mythology, while perpetuating ritual activity, also serves to coerce the individual by means of a traditional peer pressure necessary for the guaranteed continuation of the society.

As society changed, so did the function of tattooing. For example, it became a visual weapon used by the Picts and subsequently the Romans to make themselves appear " more fearsome " in battle. Tattooing was adopted by English nobility to proclaim devotion to a loved, or to identify religious significance. At the opposite end of the social strata laborers, artisans, and entertainers (prostitutes) also frequented tattoo parlors. Even criminals developed an affinity for tattooing as a pledge of allegiance to a particular group. The organized Japanese yakuza, while sporting full-body designs of great beauty and detail, are a prime example of this type of loyalty. It is also important to note that in it's history, tattooing was not always a voluntary activity. Many individuals still bear the tattooed number etched by an anonymous attendant in a Nazi death camp, their lives thus reduced even further to a sub-human level.

Why would anyone in this day and age do that to their own body?

The mere thought of a sharp metallic needle piercing the vulnerable surface of the skin and depositing ink repels some, while seducing others.

The reasons surrounding why a person chooses to become tattooed are too numerous to list. For some, it's allure stems from being taboo or forbidden, while others are mesmerized by it's inherent beauty, detail, and symbolism. Tattoo's function as diary markers, recording time and place in a person's life. It provides an individual with a suit of psychic armor which will always be fixed in place. For others, it becomes a reminder to try to be free and feeling, and not take life too seriously. Since it is a very personal choice, it reinforces a sense of uniqueness, while requiring trust and submission. As one devotee aptly put it " I don't have tattoo's, I am tattooed."

Piercing

" Western society thinks of piercing in terms of letting poisons out, whereas primitive society regards piercing as for letting light in. " 9

One of the most obvious examples of piercing in contemporary society is for the purpose of wearing an earring. It is a quick and relatively painless procedure that, it seems, most participants take for granted. The incentive is strictly for ornamentation. One may purchase that great pair of earrings in the store window in the mall and dangle them proudly in public. But when I thought about it, a hole is being punctured into human flesh. As quick and innocent as it may appear, it is a physical modification for the purpose of adornment; and it stems from primitive origins. It symbolizes, in a simple but nonetheless ritualistic way, a rite of passage. Since this often takes place during the teenage years, it functions to mark an individual's sense of arriving at the precipice of adulthood.

Young female babies are sometimes pierced and outfitted with tiny earrings, perhaps to help alleviate that infant androgyny. Even men have indulged in getting that one ear pierced as an announcement of lifestyle or affinity. I was amazed to find out just how vast the aesthetic of body piercing was in both primitive society and today.

Tribal societies limited their practice of piercing the body to primarily the lip and ear region (I'll come back to this). Although initially it was performed as a device for decoration (it provided an orifice which could contain colorful ornamentation), it also functioned as a reference to important social positions such as marital status and sexual maturity.

My research did not turn up much information regarding a widespread interest in piercing by primitive societies. It appeared as though body painting and tattooing were sufficient for their needs.

As time went on, however, the practice of infibulation evolved into an aesthetic which included different areas of the body. Roman centurions wore nipple rings as a sign of their virility and courage, and as a dress accessory for holding their capes. The Egyptians viewed navel piercing as an emblem of royalty, and it's practice was denied to commoners. Victorian women would sport rings in their

nipples to accentuate their natural size and shape. It was also during the Victorian era that I found references to genital piercing with regards to fashion.

In primitive society the erogenous zones and genital areas were not viewed upon as suitable locations for piercing (many other practices were applied to the genital regions of both sexes for various reasons, but since these areas were generally covered from public view, the intention was not for decoration). Their reasons were simple, perpetuation was based on procreation and nourishment, one does not tamper or interfere with these issues while living in the wild.

For people in contemporary society who seek the exotic, piercing has become an obvious adornment of choice. It's lure is mainly a sexual one. There are no fewer (according to my research) than eight different types of male genital piercing currently practiced today. Most genital piercing, although being decorative because of their elaborate metal jewelry, is sought after to enhance sexual stimulation for both partners. In some Arabic cultures it was even used as a tool to insure chastity.

Scarification

I was able to find only minimal information dealing with the primitive practice of scarification. Much of the data I came across merely gave a brief description of this type of body and facial adornment, mainly in the context of it's relationship to tattooing. I found it, nonetheless, an interesting mode of modification which is still done (on a much smaller scale) today.

Cave paintings of the Horned Goddess of Tassili N' Ajjer (Algeria) depict a ceremoniously decorated female with numerous markings on her shoulders, breasts, thighs and calves. These rhythmic punctuations follow a pattern very similar to ones used when scarifying the skin.

Scarification, like tattooing, is a painful, indelible process that most likely came into being during various initiation rites, to mark social connection and solidarity within the group. It was primarily the black skinned race who adopted this type of modification simply because tattooing the skin was not an effective option (although other lighter skinned races have used this method of adornment on occasion).

" The basic cicatrization technique involves lifting and cutting the skin, followed by an application of an irritant preparation that inhibits healing and promotes the formation of a raised keloid scar." 10

One theory regarding primitive scarification (besides decoration) is that it was also used as an early form of vaccination to help build up the body's immune system, especially in women of childbearing age. The perpetuation of the species depended on their body's ability to produce many offspring before they became too old. Many children were necessary within the society to care for their parents in their old age.

In Europe, " Germans used to get dueling scars; in the early sixties about 50% of the Reichstag had a scar on their face - like a badge of honor...this is the only scarification we know of in Western society." 11

Today, the relatively small number of people (usually immersed in the S/M lifestyle) who practice scarification, or cutting, limit their work to small designs which are either left to produce the raised scar, or will have ink rubbed into them to emphasize the design against the skin.

Altered States

" The function of ritual, as I understand it, is to give form to human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth. " 12

Several times I've referred to rites and rituals with regards to their providing a forum in which body adornment usually takes place. During the course of my research I read about a curious side effect which can result from some forms of body modification and seems to illustrate, to me, what Joseph Campbell might be referring to as " depth ".

Many tribal and primitive societies consume specific natural substances which induce a drug-like state in the individual. Shamans will enter into hallucinogenic trances to cast spells, cure illness, and confront the ghosts of the ancestors. Their " so called " heightened awareness will suggest that the individual, indeed the environment itself, has become imbued with magic. This information is documented fact and not very surprising to me, but what I found to be very interesting are accounts of people experiencing an altered state, not with drugs, but as a result of physical modification.

How the body's defense mechanisms cope with an over/underload of stimulation is not new to me. We all know that fasting, sensory and sleep deprivation, emotional stress, high fever, etc...will cause the mind to imagine or exaggerate things. We have heard of marathon runners who " hit the wall " as their bodies tell them they have pushed too hard for too long. But I never thought that physical pain, intentionally induced, could produce a similar response. I thought, if the body experienced either a high level of pain or a prolonged period of pain the individual would faint; the body would simply shut down. But my research uncovered some people who, by means of physical modifications, will pass through this threshold of pain and experience a lightness of being, a euphoria. " Pain is not a stimulus, it is a perception, and as such it can be influenced by a variety of psychological factors." 13 This could be an example of what Jung described as a form of possession or hysteria brought on by " an eclipse of the conscious mind and ordinary sense perception. " 14

One individual who has achieved these enhanced states is named Fakir Musafar. He has subjected himself to the O-Kee-Pa religious ceremony of the North American Mandan Indians. This event was illustrated and documented in 1867 by George Catlin, and depicts two braves suspended by hooks imbedded into the flesh of their back and chest for a long period of time. The primary purpose was to initiate the individuals and to induce "visions".

Of the Indian ritual known as the "Spears of Siva", Fakir recounts: "a framework is placed around your body and locked on; sharp rods with points are stuck into the skin, then you rise and dance and walk and move. The more you move, with the rattling and vibrating of the spears, the deeper they go into your skin, and the longer you do it the deeper they go into your skin. So, you don't feel pain as you once knew it - you can get into a great state of ecstasy and you can flip off, which I've done a couple of times, into a totally altered state - in two cases I had a real out-of-body experience. I just totally left my body, lifted out of it, floated up above and watched this body like a robot running around, going crazy, with these spears jangling and clanging in the framework." 15

REFLECTIONS

Since my investigation ultimately uncovered so many modes of body adornment, I felt it necessary to be selective with regards to which ones I included in my research section. I decided to write about those activities which are most commonly being practiced today by individuals who choose to refer to themselves as "modern primitives." The term is used "to describe a non-tribal person who responds to primal urges and does something with the body." 16

Other areas of adornment, too numerous to mention in any detail include:

Contortion - gymnastics, yoga exercises and Hindu practices of Sadhus, enlargement of piercings, cupping, high-heel shoes, foot-binding (Chinese lotus feet), stretching, etc...

Constriction - Bondage, tight ligatures and belts, corsets, body sculpting, etc...

Deprivation - Fasting, sleep deprivation, restriction of movement, sensory isolation in boxes, etc...

Encumberment - Heavy bracelets, anklets, neck ornamentation, encasements, etc...

Fire - Sun tanning, electricity, steam baths and boxes, branding, etc...

Penetration - (includes tattooing, piercing and scarification)

Suspension - Hung on a cross, suspended by wrists, thighs, waist, ankles or hooks, suspended by constrictions or multiple piercings, etc...

Other additional material dealt with hair as adornment, the many uses of clothing or dress and the meaning of masks. Contemporary activities such as plastic surgery and body building, although very appropriate for this subject were eliminated because of their acceptable (normal?) status in today's society.

These areas not included could very well set the stage for a continued exploration in the future. Needless to say, I feel as though I've learned a great deal from this research. It is a fascinating subject.

" All of the forms of body alteration discussed above share a consciously constructed purpose for those who engage in them. They are mechanisms of social communication. Most basically, all forms of body modification involve some measure of decoration; the corporeal changes move the recipient closer to the aesthetic ideal of the group - be it conventional or deviant - with which he or she identifies. Further, they have the function of providing symbolic information about the bearer's personal interests, social position, relationships, or self-definition. Body alteration is culture. " 17

OVERVIEW

The process I followed for all of the pieces in the thesis exhibition was, although a lot of work, the most satisfying aspect of the project. My aim was to remain fairly organized and structured with the initial planning stages (to the point of keeping a written journal for each piece) but allow for some experimentation and spontaneity during the shooting and final printing. The exhibition as a whole followed a particular evolution with regards to the sequence in which the pieces were completed. I purposely began with what I felt was a more literal piece, then moved through a metamorphosis where I used myself as the subject being " imprinted " and ended with work that was much more complex and enigmatic in content.

During my first year at RIT I had been introduced to new ways of working with photographic imagery. Prior to coming to Rochester I hadn't done much work with color materials and, consequently, saw some interesting possibilities arise in the early stages of planning the look of the exhibition. I had also been introduced to various alternative process techniques such as cyanotype, van dyke brown, gum printing, platinum/palladium printing and kwik print which were completely new to me. They allowed me to approach my work in a more informal manner and I loved their rough and textural quality. I was excited with the prospect of producing a body of work which would look very different than the pristinely classic black and white print I was accustomed to.

MARKS

Marks was the first piece I completed for the exhibition, and because of that I will always view it as the show's cornerstone.

Normally I do not title my work, allowing the viewer to analyze and interpret the images from their own point of reference. Titles serve as navigational markers and that's exactly why I chose to use them for my thesis work. Because the work was very different visually I hoped their titles would act as a unifying thread to bind the pieces together.

In its obvious interpretation the term " marks " serves as a slang expression to describe a person who is tattooed. However, the variety of uses and definitions of the word mark (marked, to mark) suggested so many possibilities within the theme of my work I decided it was a very appropriate title that was not too specific. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary lists, among others: something designed to record position; a target; a goal; an object of attack, ridicule or abuse; a standard of performance, quality or condition; a sign; an impression made on something; a distinguishing trait or quality; a characteristic; an indication of ownership; a lasting or strong impression; an assessment of merits; to set apart; to take notice of.

Originally I had hoped to literally burn the title onto a piece of wood using a hot iron, unfortunately my initial attempts to " brand " the letters proved to be much too illegible. My second option was to photographically " burn " the type onto the wooden support using a Liquid Light emulsion in the darkroom.

The images within the piece were edited from the photographs I had taken while shooting in Brooklyn at the Coney Island Tattoo Festival (see Appendix A). I was invited to photograph the numerous participants of this annual event, some of whom sported more than just tattoos. I brought with me a hand painted cloth backdrop, two strobes and umbrellas with a generator, and a Hasselblad camera with a 150mm lens mounted on a tripod. I shot both black and white negative film (see Appendix C) and Ektachrome Professional transparencies. The slides were merely to have a documentation in color, I knew I would only use the black and white negatives for my thesis work.

Once contact sheets were made and images chosen the next step was to print the photographs, full frame with a black edge, on 11x14 Ilfobrom fiber base paper. Originally I expected to hand color these prints with Marshall Photo Oils but after coloring two prints I realized that something was missing. They were too conservative in appearance and merely came across as nice hand colored portraits. In retrospect I realize I was probably being too neat. They needed something to make them more visually interesting and unique.

At about this time my reading uncovered a practice among the ancient Briton society. They would collect leaves from the woad plant, a European herb from the mustard family, to produce a purple blue dye. This dye was then utilized to "stain" the skin to mark a particular event. I thought it would be interesting to use this idea of staining the portraits to celebrate the spectacle of the festival, but I did not want to merely dye the surface of the prints. I instead decided it should be a very subtle addition of color.

Further investigation led me to a process called diazo which is used to translate architectural drawings into blueprints. I was instantly intrigued to learn that a photograph could also be used. Initial attempts, however, proved to be unsatisfactory because of substantial loss of detail. Another process called erasable sepia yielded much better results (see Appendix C). These produced a sepia reproduction from my original prints on a vellum paper. The vellum could easily be "stained" with color from behind with no significant loss of image detail.

Although I was pleased with the mosaic grid created by all of these portraits I felt the piece needed some other information to break up its uniformity. I wanted to introduce imagery that might reinforce a sense of ritual within the piece by blending ancient and contemporary iconography. The six images I chose contained references to other types of adornment in an attempt to balance the content within the piece. Each image was initially photographed with Polapan 35mm film (a black and white Polaroid direct positive slide film) then printed in the dark-room on 16x20 Ilfobrom paper as a negative image. These prints were then enlarged onto Xerox paper and incorporated into the center panel of the piece. The final framed piece was assembled as three panels and measured 74 "x140 ".

CORPUS

The corpus series became the second facet of the exhibition and consisted of six autobiographical studies. The title " corpus " was chosen because a human figure served as the main structure or host onto which visual information would be imprinted.

During my first year at RIT I began to use myself as the subject of my portrait work. These were usually nude studies which were not always easy for me to do, especially since I was striving to reveal aspects of my persona which I wasn't necessarily comfortable with. These images became my trial by fire; my purging of the soul. Through them I developed an interest in issues of gender representation, aspects of yin and yang, anima and animus, and tried to uncover that gray area where the two halves seem to mesh. We all have that side we repress and yet it contributes strong personality traits that constitute who we are.

The corpus series endeavored to explore these contrasts which dwell just under the surface of our psyche by means of a ritualistic " photographic tattooing "; a marking by light. These contrasts would include the juxtaposition of imprinted information and body gesture (body language / kinesics); and as a larger issue, the blending of corporeality and ethereality. The figure was to be presented as an anonymous being with no facial information visible to the viewer.

The technical aspects regarding the production of this series became the most difficult activity of the exhibition. The problems began right at the onset.

The first issue dealt with exactly how I should imprint the chosen imagery onto my body. Since I wanted the final result to appear somewhat believable I needed to choose a technique that would produce an acceptable result. After initial attempts of sandwiching two negatives together failed I became very concerned. Sandwiching made the information appear much too flat, I needed the " tattoo " to convincingly correspond to the contours and landmarks of the body surface. I eventually decided to project the information onto my body with a slide projector, then expose the resulting image onto single negative.

I chose Polaroid Type 55 film for three reasons: First I wanted to work with a 4x5 negative (I knew the final prints would be at least 16x20); secondly, I wanted the immediacy of a Polaroid exposure, and lastly, I liked the rough, textural edging which resulted from the paper support surrounding the image. It took a lot of trial and error to achieve an acceptable exposure (the bright projector light in conjunction with the much dimmer ambient light) with regards to a balance of detail between the figure and the projected information. Once the desired negative was in hand I then made a full-frame print onto 16x20 Ilfobrom fiber base paper.

Next I needed a same-size negative from the print. Since I required the negatives be screened as a halftone (to retain as much subtle detail as possible) I had them made commercially by Flower City Printers in downtown Rochester.

Originally, I had planned to create the final images as Gum prints on artist's watercolor paper. I attained moderate success with this process during my alternative process class and hoped to improve my results with these larger screened negatives, but I had a problem due to loss of image clarity. For some reason the paper sizing (too much/too little ?) was causing an excess of detail to flake off when it dried. To my disappointment I decided to pursue a different process. I chose to continue with Kwik Print.

Kwik Print, although possessing a limited color palette in comparison to Gum Printing, would give me fairly consistent results while providing me with a similar multiple-printing technique. Numerous exposures could be layered to " build-up " a desired image, surface and texture. I decided to concentrate on working with two colors, cyan and magenta, and the resulting purple-brown blend created by superimposing them.

My original intention was to use fabric as a support material for these images. I felt that stretching a cloth within a crude frame would suggest an organic, skin-like surface. But once again, due to a loss of detail, I was compelled to alter my plans. I switched to working on the vinyl sheets which are manufactured specifically for Kwik Print projects.

A few words about the backdrop. I used it because it had it's own particular markings which suggested to me a sort of picture writing. It's curious cuneiform

symbols expanded the element of visual marking to shroud the body within it's center. This heightened the sense of ritual for me.

The imprinted information I chose to project onto my body dealt with issues of religion and spiritual affinity, physical aggression, gender related posture, technology, love, and vulnerability.

The six individual pieces were framed and measured 18" x 22".

ANTHROPOLOGY / LEARNED BEHAVIOR

The third body of work for the thesis exhibition visually explored issues that were, I feel, dramatic with regards to their presentation, and enigmatic within the framework of adornment. I was attempting to photographically imply that experiences, memories, and physical events also function to "adorn" our personality and individuality by leaving a psychological mark.

I actually began using this particular photographic technique during my first year of core classes although my motivation was, at that time, a very different one. I became interested in strip images produced with multiple exposures creating a collage of narrative, time, and space in almost a filmic sense. My first images were layered black and white film, and although they conveyed a mysterious tableau, some important detail was minimized among the middle gray tonalities. At about this same time I also became interested in juxtaposing images to create a new reality through association. It was from these two different approaches I came to develop the look of the color pieces in the show.

An exciting change for me was altering my thinking toward a full color aesthetic. I knew I wanted to create the images with more than one camera exposure, but I also wanted full control over the colors recorded on the film. To accomplish this goal I first compiled appropriate black and white information, then added color by placing gels over my camera lens. A written record was kept so that I could purposely sequence or overlay a particular color combination.

Similar subject matter was utilized for the first layer of images in both pieces. I wanted a foundation of human facial expressions that were cropped fairly close. To accomplish this I rented an adult video which I could scan and then photograph. I also liked the surface quality achieved when shooting from a television monitor. All of the existing color was initially turned off and as I continued to photograph these often exaggerated facial gestures I changed the color of the gel.

I used a 35mm SLR camera with a 55mm macro lens mounted on a tripod. Once the entire roll of 36 exposure Kodacolor Gold film was exposed, I rewound the film and proceeded to reshoot with a second layer of new information. Referring to my written record eliminated the possibility of duplicating imagery or color when adding these subsequent layers. I was also very careful to properly under-expose each frame depending on how many times the film was to be rephotographed.

My second and third exposures of the film included information I deemed pertinent to my subject. The second layer usually consisted of images found in print from a wide variety of sources, while the third layer was photographed from life to add an element of depth (see Appendix C).

The titles " Anthropology " and " Learned Behavior " were inspired by assigned reading I had from a class in cultural anthropology. Loosely defined, anthropology is the study of man in culture. This train of thought led me to an investigation of juxtaposing the human element with icons and actions which I considered to be culturally imbued.

The first color piece ("Anthropology ") was an attempt to blend primitive and contemporary imagery. I was trying to illustrate how little we have changed with regards to our so called uncivilized past. The format of the piece is long and horizontal to roughly simulate those linear chronological graphs found in most textbooks which mark eras and historical events. I was very pleased with the success of this piece, and wanted to continue in this direction, but felt a more intimate exploration of this subject was needed.

The second piece (" Learned Behavior ") evolved from an interest in how we learn to function in an acceptable manner within a society. Culture is a learned behavior. We, as human beings are not born with an inherent ability to socialize. We are born with the genetic equipment to achieve this goal, but without the appropriate stimulation, the result is far from what would be considered " normal ". Our absorption of culture is based on a system or systems of behavior which is presented to us as experience. I contend that these experiences, each in their own way, mark or adorn our character and help establish who we are as individuals within a society. I realize that this opinion is a simplification within a larger framework of human development, but I found it to be an interesting

endeavor given my original starting point with body adornment.

" Learned Behavior " is an autobiographical work. It attempts to chronicle and highlight important stages in my own development. Throughout the piece I used images which have some significant meaning for me. These appropriated pictures, by some well known imagemakers, were included as homage and appreciation, as well as an indication of their influence upon me. Also, by inserting recognizable photographs within this new context, I hoped to prompt a new interpretation from the viewer. Text also added an important level to this piece. The inclusion of words to contrast or reinforce photographic information is an activity I find very rewarding. The words came from the dictionary and a book entitled " Health and Happiness " originally published in 1930 (see Slide Page).

" Anthropology " consisted of two panels joined at the center and framed as a single piece. It's overall dimension measured 42"x178".

" Learned Behavior " consisted of three individually framed panels, each measuring 50"x 50".

CONCLUSION

As with any creative endeavor I undertake it seems unavoidable to be completely satisfied with the outcome, and in retrospect I'm convinced that this should be a desired result when choosing to investigate a course of study which is new and unfamiliar. One should be flexible enough to allow for any unexpected problems to direct your progress. This, I feel, becomes a major component in how we learn and grow as creative people.

There were definite high and low points experienced throughout the duration of this project, but when the exhibit was finally hanging on the gallery walls I felt as though a cohesive body of work had been accomplished. During my thesis defense I was asked if I would have done things differently now that the work was finished and my response was " yes, probably everything ". A question like that, it seems to me, is one asked out of context. What I do today is appropriate for today, tomorrow is always a different story. I have tried not to view certain aspects of this work as " failures " but instead as attempts which weren't, in my mind, appropriate. Something nonetheless was experienced and learned and as a result this project has left it's mark on me.

One of the elements that pleased me the most was that the work changed. It evolved from a physical, very surface oriented documentary presentation to a more complex, layered psychological one without straying too much from my original intention. I felt as though I began to enter a level which, although relevant, was not initially an obvious one. I was also very satisfied with the way the techniques I chose to work with helped to reinforce the content of the work. How photographic information, which is generally accepted as a media which will truthfully and accurately represent a reality, was successfully utilized to suggest something transparent and ethereal. " We wear our media; they are our new clothes. TV clothes our bodies tattoo style. It writes on our skins. It clothes us in information. It programs us." 18

I was also very pleased with my decision to change the original size of some pieces. I had never worked on such a grand scale before and because of that I feel the information within the work was greatly enhanced. As a consequence, viewing distance played an important part in terms of deciphering the images. This size change did not force me to " break out of the photographic frame ", but I was pleased that I at least attempted to expand upon some of the frame's limitations.

Were there specific aspects regarding the thesis I wish had been different? Yes.

Initially I had chosen to produce the work while maintaining minimal contact with my thesis board. Although our limited meetings were very positive I now realize that more feedback from them both individually and collectively would have been beneficial to my rate of progress. Certainly more possibilities might have been brought to light.

" MARKS " The companion booklet I had researched, designed and hoped to print in the NTID printing lab (as a result of my taking Judy Levy's Photo in Print class) was, much to my disappointment, never completed. (See Appendix B and Slides). A lot of time and energy was spent in pre-production stages but the opportunity to print the booklet on an offset printing press never materialized.

Thesis work began during my second year of classes at RIT and I recall too often other commitments and distractions interfered with my progress. Extra time devoted specifically to the thesis exhibition might have allowed me to further develop my ideas while also permitting more experimentation with process.

Writing this thesis report after time and distance had separated me from RIT was difficult. Having no access to pertinent materials available in RIT's library and archives proved to be a hardship.

Immediate plans for the future contain somewhat of an extension of this work. I have continued my involvement with the Coney Island Tattoo Festival and currently have a substantial portfolio of black and white tattoo portraits I will soon exhibit and will hopefully publish in book form. My work with large scale, layered photographs has also continued.

Overall, I feel my involvement in the graduate Fine Art Photography program at RIT has been an enriching experience which allowed me to grow as an imagemaker and pursue new directions with my work. The disciplines I have established will certainly inspire my creativity in the years to come.

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- 4 Elizabeth Hall, " The Voice of the Body." GEO (Vol. 6, May, 1984), 68.
- 5 Olivia Vlahos, Body - The Ultimate Symbol(New York: J.B.Lippincott Co., 1979), 20.
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- 7 Thevoz, The Painted Body, 39.
- 8 Clinton R. Sanders, Customizing The Body (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 10.
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- 11 Vale & Juno, Modern Primitives, 140.
- 12 Joseph Campbell, Myths To Live By (New York: Bantam Books, 1988), 43.
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APPENDIX A

Coney Island



CONTACT: Amy Krakow (212) 619-3273
Dick Zigun, Sideshows By The Seashore (718) 372-5159

CONEY ISLAND ONCE AGAIN CELEBRATES THE ART OF THE TATTOO

Third Annual Tattoo Festival
Saturday September 10 1988 at 6:00 PM

Coney Island and tattooing: synonomous for over a century. As long as there's been a Coney, there have been tattooists creating body art at America's playground by the sea. Once again, Sideshows By The Seashore celebrates the grand shared history of Coney Island and tattooing at the THIRD ANNUAL TATTOO FESTIVAL, SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 10, 1988 at 6:00 PM.

The success of last year's festival, where tattooists spoke about the art and history of the tattoo, and where tattoos were proudly and gloriously displayed, promises even more fun this year. Several artists and photographers will be on hand and exhibiting their work, including: Susan Stava, Clayton Patterson, Tom Santelli, Andrew Sistrand (Z), Pulsating Paula, Steve Bonge, Efrain John Gonzalez and Matty Jankowski. Guest tattooists slated to appear include Brooklyn's own tattoo master, Huggy Bear Ferris, Spider Webb and many others. Joining the fun will be Sideshows By The Seashore's illustrated man, Michael Wilson as well as many more magnificent human works of art.

The Third Annual Tattoo Festival: Saturday September 10, 1988 at 6:00 PM will be held at Sideshows By The Seashore, Boardwalk and West 12th Street, Coney Island U.S.A. The Tattoo Festival is produced by Amy Krakow for Acme Productions in conjunction with Coney Island U.S.A., Dick Zigun, Artistic Director. Admission to the Festival is \$5.00 for untattooed people, half price if you show your tattoo.

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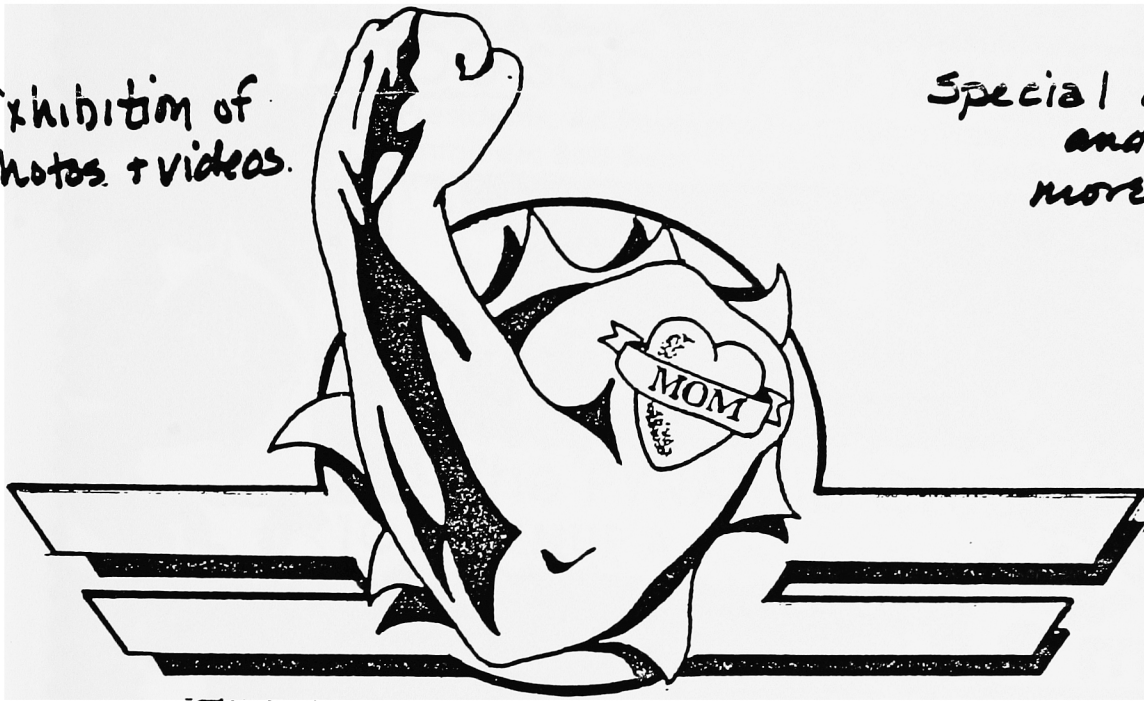
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 10TH, 1988
6pm until we end...

at Sideshow by the Seashore
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Boardwalk and West 12th Street —

Exhibition of
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and
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APPENDIX B

Book Text

"...the tallest of them, stark naked save for paint and a belt, was Jack...He paused and looked around. He was safe from shame or self-consciousness behind the mask of his paint and he could look at each of them in turn."

William Golding. Lord of the Flies.

"Mixtures of fat, gum, castor oil, beeswax, soot, iron, talc, aluminum and various dyes that we daub on eyelids, lashes, cheeks and lips are not so different from the garish paints used on face or body in isolated parts of the world. If we stop short of knocking out teeth, perforating noses and cutting designs in our skin that heal in raised scars, we still chop off the foreskin of infant boys, encase our childrens teeth in metal cages, make holes in our ears, deform our noses, inject silicone into our breasts, carve fat away from our buttocks and thighs, and cut and stitch our aging faces to preserve a mask-like semblance of youth."

Elizabeth Hall. "The Voice of the Body," Geo, (Vol. 6, May 1984).

"On one of the pages a pair of eyes glanced at him swiftly. Parker sped on, then stopped. His heart too appeared to cut off; there was absolute silence. It said as plainly as if silence were a language itself, GO BACK. Parker returned to the picture - the haloed head of a flat stern Byzantine Christ with all-demanding eyes. He sat there trembling; his heart began slowly to beat again as if it were being brought to life by a subtle power. "You found what you want?" the artist asked. Parker's throat was too dry to speak. He got up and thrust the book at the artist, opened at the picture. "That'll cost you plenty," the artist said."

Flannery O'Connor. Parker's Back.

"Man is born prematurely, with a skin too clear, too fine, too fragile, calling for some kind of artificial protection, whether of a physical or thermic or, most of all, a symbolic nature. Man is exposed in both senses of the term: to dangers and to the eyes of others. He is the only animal that is born naked, in the Biblical sense. And so he accedes to his identity and his social status only by way of meaningful modifications of his body."

Michel Thevoz. The Painted Body.

" About this time I noticed an odd sensation. A powerful sweet perfume is rising from the sailor's arm. My eyes swerve from the mingling red and green and I find myself staring intently into the waste bucket by my left side. As I watch the calm rubble of colored candy wrappers, cigarette butts and old wads of muddily stained Kleenex, Carmey tosses a tissue soaked with fresh red onto the heap. Behind the silhouetted heads of Ned and Mr. Tomolillo the panthers, roses and red-nippled ladies wink and jitter. If I fall forward or to the right, I will jog Carmey's elbow and make him stab the sailor and ruin a perfectly good fifteen-dollar eagle, not to mention disgracing my sex. The only alternative is a dive into the bucket of bloody papers."

Sylvia Plath. The Fifteen Dollar Eagle.

" As for the rest of him, I cannot say how I sat and stared, for he was a riot of rockets and fountains and people, in such intricate detail and color that you could hear the voices murmuring small and muted, from the crowds that inhabited his body. When his flesh twitched, the tiny mouths flickered, the tiny green - and - gold eyes winked, the tiny pink hands gestured."

Ray Bradbury. The Illustrated Man.

" The boy had followed as closely as possible the original brush strokes, filling them in solid, and it was marvelous the way he had made use of the spine and the protrusion of the shoulder blades so that they became part of the composition. What is more, he had somehow managed to achieve - even with this slow process - a certain spontaneity. The portrait was quite alive; it contained much of that twisted, tortured quality so characteristic of Soutine's other work. It was not a good likeness. It was a mood rather than a likeness, the model's face vague and tipsy, the background swirling around her head in a mass of dark-green curling strokes. "It's tremendous!" "I rather like it myself." The boy stood back, examining it critically. "You know," he added, "I think it's good enough for me to sign."

Roald Dahl. Skin.

" You got a dream, Carmey says, without saying a word, you got a rose on the heart, an eagle in the muscle, you got the sweet Jesus himself, so come in to me. Wear your heart on your skin in this life, I'm the man can give you a deal. Dog's, wolves, horses and lions for the animal lover. For the ladies, butterflies, birds of paradise, baby heads smiling or in tears, take your choice. Roses, all sorts, large, small, bud and full bloom, roses with name scrolls, roses with thorns, roses with Dresden-doll heads sticking up in dead center, pink petal, green leaf, set off smart by a lead-black line. Snakes and dragons for Frankenstein. Not to mention cowgirls, hula girls, mermaids and movie queens, ruby-nippled and bare as you please. If you've got a back to spare there's Christ on the cross, a thief at either elbow and angels overhead to right and left holding up a scroll with " Mount Calvary " on it in Old English script, close as yellow can get to gold."

Sylvia Plath. The Fifteen Dollar Eagle.

" If a man or a woman can be identified under the ceremonial costume, this is said to be a bad omen. When the disguise is foolproof, the ceremony is successful and good fortune will redound on the tribe. Decoration enables a person to act out the role assigned to him by myth and magic. He assumes a dramatic new identity, which has a covert set of associated meanings."

Scot Morris. "Man as Art," Omni, (Vol. 3, June 1981).

" However, he makes pictures of bizarre subjects not to shock but to cause us to ponder society's prohibitions and make us more aware of human needs. His pictures are neither parodies nor the results of feverish hallucinations but bold and haunting reflections of a world that exists all around the globe. In the climate of contemporary hedonism his pictures, among other things, reflect a new openness to expressions of inner feelings, one's own and those of others."

Van Deren Coke. Introduction to Joel-Peter Witkin, Forty Photographs.

" Have I a "real" face, or are there only layers of the persona - mask after mask? Yet something is behind all this: a moving force, an actor, that could perhaps wear any face, or all of them. Perhaps, if this force were conscious, the masks, the roles, would be simply channels, through which it could express itself and whatever greater force it may spring from that may flow through it. If that were so, the mask would be a metaphor, a symbol, and a tool for the real self. And the real self might be itself a mask - a symbol and a tool for the life that is behind and above it."

D.M. Dooling. Introduction: "Mask and Metaphor," Parabola - Myth and the Quest for Meaning, (Vol. VI, No. 3).

" Give a man a mask and he will tell the truth."

Oscar Wilde.

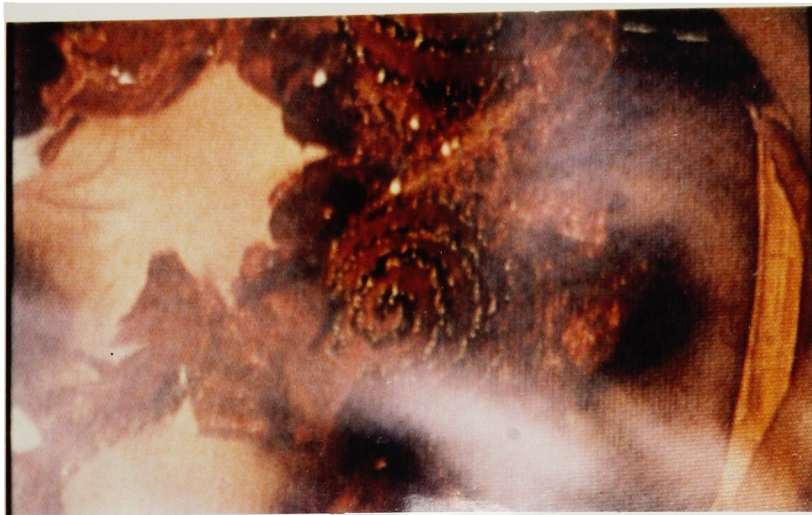
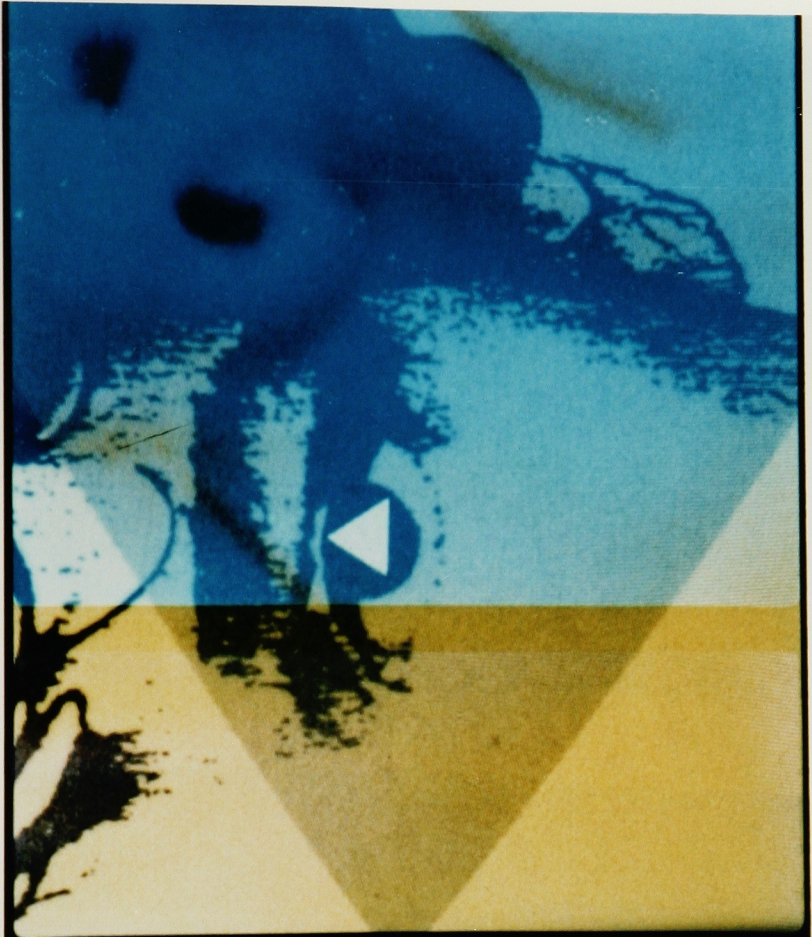
APPENDIX C

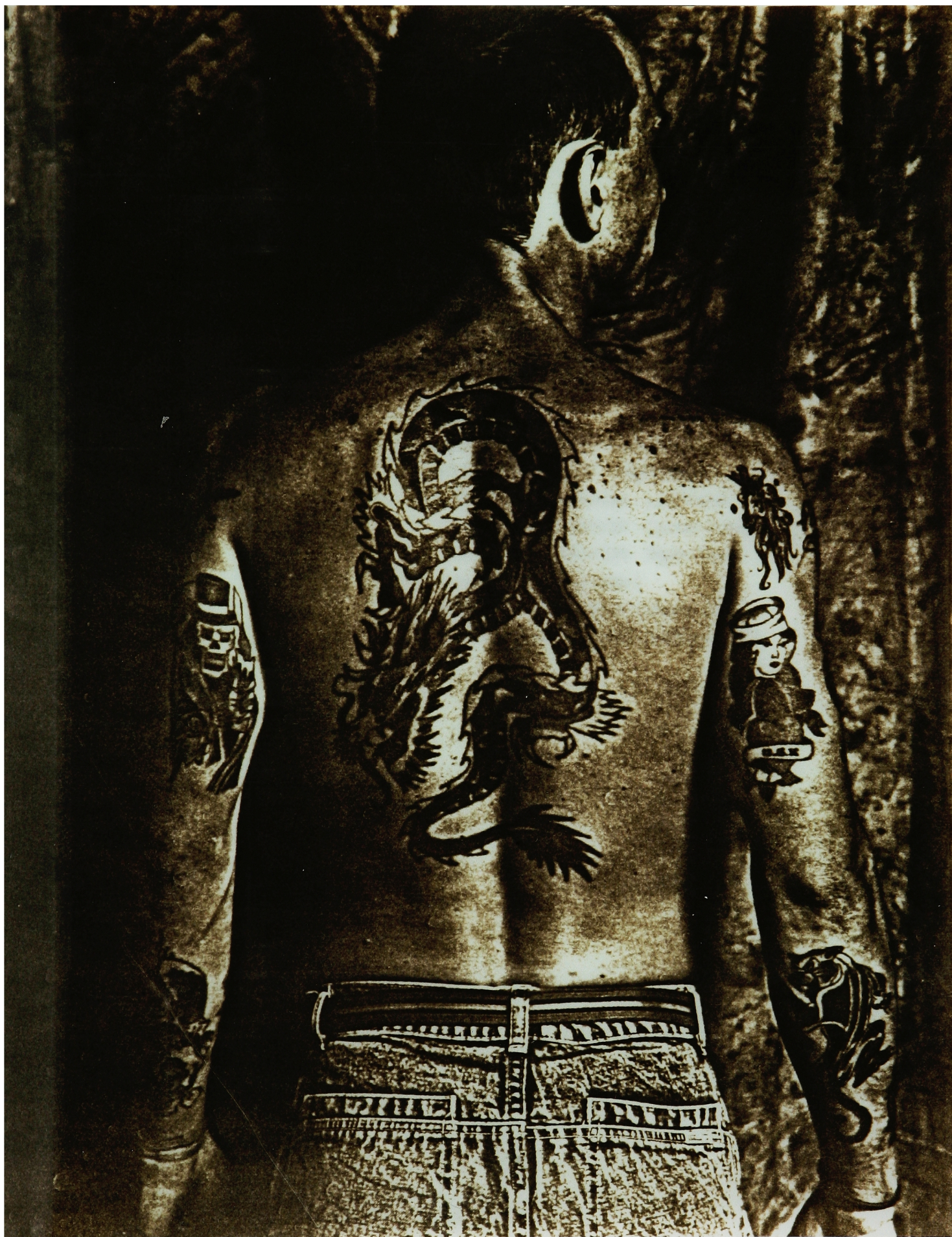
Original Photographs





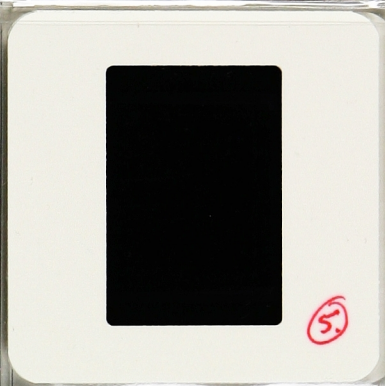
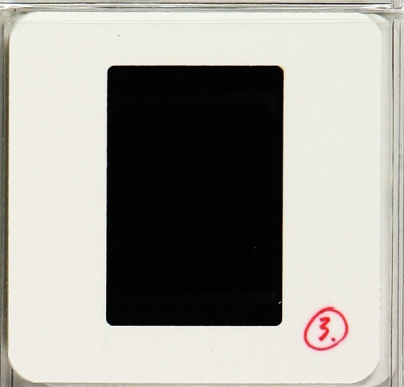






SLIDE LIST

1. MARKS
2. First Kwik Print (test)
3. CORPUS
4. CORPUS
5. CORPUS
6. CORPUS
7. CORPUS
8. ANTHROPOLOGY - Left Panel
9. ANTHROPOLOGY - Right Panel
10. LEARNED BEHAVIOR - Left Panel
11. LEARNED BEHAVIOR - Center Panel
12. LEARNED BEHAVIOR - Right Panel
13. Exhibition (partial view)
14. MARKS - Book Spread (pages 8-9)
15. MARKS - Book Spread (pages 24-25)





10.



11.



12.



13.



14.



15.